

THE REAL DEAL

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Traveling play seeks open house

By Vanessa Londono

Audiences of "The Sublet Experiment" have no choice but to make themselves at home in someone else's apartment.

Instead of a theater, the romantic comedy has been performed in homes on the Upper East Side, Chelsea, Williamsburg and Astoria -- anywhere playwright and co-producer Ethan Youngerman can secure an apartment.

"The Sublet Experiment" is the story of a man who finds a sublet from a Craigslist ad offering free rent for sexual favors.

Anywhere from 12 to 30 (in a Tribeca loft) folding chairs are filled by audience members who are encouraged to make themselves at home and grab a free beer from the fridge -- while watching the play.

Youngerman chose to stage the production in actual apartments in part to emphasize that "how and where you live affects who you are," he said.

"It's a statement of how people are desperate for apartments in New York," said Youngerman. "It's part of a larger loneliness of looking for a place where you belong. The search is not all that different from finding a romantic partner."

"The experience we're trying to create is that the audience members are like flies on the wall," said Michelle Tattenbaum, director and co-producer. "We put the audience all around a room and they're watching someone else's life unfolding."

"It's kind of striking to be in a real apartment and be a fly on the wall," said Youngerman. "It's amazing to really see an apartment and really see people living in it."

The play changes slightly as the cast adapts to a different apartment in a different neighborhood every week.

"You get a certain impression of people based on neighborhood and size of apartment," said Tattenbaum. "When the audience is in the apartment, they are already wondering about the actual people who live in the apartment. The type of apartment tells them a lot about the characters that live in the apartment, whether it's a high-rise in Chelsea or a walk-up tenement flat in Williamsburg."

"The reaction has been to the experience as much as to the play," said Youngerman. "The audience gets sucked in a lot more, but they're more aware of their surroundings and are initially uncomfortable being inches away from a cast member."

Performances of "The Sublet Experiment" began in November and will continue as long as Youngerman and Tattenbaum continue to find space. The play has apartments lined up through the end of February and scheduled shows through March. Youngerman is approaching condo developers and subletting companies to secure a home for the play.

"We've even been thinking about literally approaching agents about apartments that just don't sell," said Youngerman. "When you do a walk-through, the best-case scenario is you sit on the couch for a second. But during the play, you're sitting in the apartment for over an hour. You have a chance to really see the apartment."

"The Sublet Experiment" will be visiting Hoboken, Tribeca and Carroll Gardens during February. Performances are held Thursday and Friday at 8 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday at 7 p.m. For more information, visit subletexperiment.com.



The cast of "The Sublet Experiment," a roaming play.